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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 206310

FOR HOUGHTON

FOLLOWING REPEAT BEIRUT 6988 ACTION SECSTATE INFO DAMASCUS AUG 18.

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6988

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE, SY

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SAEB SALAM (AUG 18)

REF: (A) BEIRUT 5792, (B) BEIRUT 5755

1. SUMMARY: DURING MEETING WITH SAEB SALAM AUG 18, HE
CRITICIZED CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE, DESCRIBED HIS ATTEMPTS TO
BEGIN A SUNNI-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE WITH PIERRE GEMAYEL,
ATTACKED SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON, AND URGED USG TO PUT
PRESSURE ON CHRISTIANS TO BRING THEM TO NEGOTIATING TABLE.
END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBOFF LANE, CALLED ON SAEB
SALAM AT HIS HOME IN WEST BEIRUT AUG 18. SALAM SAID THAT
EARLIER HE HAD HOPED LEBANESE SITUATION COULD BE PATCHED
UP, BUT NOW "EVERYTHING HAS BEEN DESTROYED AND WE MUST
REBUILD." PARTITION IS IN BEING AND MOST IMMEDIATE
PROBLEM IS TO REESTABLISH INTEGRATED STATE THROUGH
NEGOTIATIONS.

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3. PERSONALITIES. SALAM RAN THROUGH HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS, GIVING THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF EACH: CHAMOUN HE DESCRIBED AS CLEVER, MEAN AND VENAL, USING WAR TO ENRICH HIMSELF; FRANGIE AS A "CRIMINAL," COMPLETELY UNTRUSTWORTHY AND DOMINATED BY CHAMOUN; JUNBLATT AS "THE BIGGEST FEUDALIST IN LEBANON," PRIMARILY A JUNBLATTI, INTERESTED IN USING SITUATION (AND IRAQI AND LIBYAN MONEY) TO BUILD HIS OWN POSITION. HE STILL FEARED FRANGIE MIGHT NAME CHAMOUN PRIME MINISTER AND REFUSE TO CALL SPECIAL SESSION OF CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, THUS PREVENTING SARKIS FROM TAKING OATH AS PRESIDENT AND ASSUMING OFFICE. PIERRE GEMAYEL, HE SAID, IS UNLIKE THE OTHERS; HE AT LEAST HAS A REAL CAUSE--DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARONITE CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONTAINMENT OF PALESTINIANS.

3. SALAM CALL ON GGEMAYEL. SALAM THEN DESCRIBED HIS VISIT TO EAST BEIRUT LAST WEEK TO CALL ON PIERRE GEMAYEL. HE SAID HE HAD RECEIVED SEVERAL WARNINGS NOT TO GO (PLANS FOR THIS VISIT HAD BEEN IN PRESS), BUT DECIDED TO GO ANYWAY. MUCH TO HIS SURPRISE, HE WAS ACCLAIMED AS HERO ON BOTH SIDES OF LINE, WHICH PROVED THAT ORDINARY LEBANESE OF ALL RELIGIONS, THOSE NOT CARRYING GUNS, ARE TIRED OF WAR AND READY FOR PEACE. SALAM TOLD GEMAYEL THAT WAR HAD NOT HELPED CHRISTIANS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS, AND THAT NEGOTIATIONS MUST BEGIN. GEMAYEL SAID HE DID NOT FAVOR PARTITION AND WAS READY TO TALK. SALAM SAID HE IS KEEPING IN REGULAR TOUCH WITH GEMAYEL IN ORDER KEEP DIALOGUE ALIVE. HE FELT THAT THEY HAVE A COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON SOME BASIC ISSUES, BUT MUST CONTINUE LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS. (HE DOES NOT EXPECT GEMAYEL TO RETURN HIS VISIT.)

4. NEGOTIATIONS. SALAM SAID HE IS WORKING TO BRING TOGETHER PHALANGE, PLO AND SYRIANS. THESE ARE KEY ELEMENTS IN PRESENT SITUATION, AND IF PHALANGE AND PLO COULD COME TO AGREEMENT WHICH HAD SYRIAN BLESSING, A BEGINNING CAN BE MADE TOWARD A SETTLEMENT. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE ON WHAT FORM NEW LEBANON

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MIGHT TAKE, BUT SAID THAT TOO MUCH HAD HAPPENED TO GO BACK TO LEBANON OF FIVE YEARS AGO. A CEASE FIRE OR ARMISTICE IS VITAL, SINCE THIS WOULD GIVE MODERATE ELEMENTS IN BOTH CAMPS CHANCE TO DOMINATE THE EXTREMISTS. WHEN THERE IS FIGHTING, THE EXTREMISTS DOMINATE, AS IN CASE OF TELL ZAATAR WHEN PHALANGE WAS WILLING TO HONOR A TRUCE BUT CHAMOUNISTS FORCED

THE BATTLE. HE HAD URGED AL REP KHOLI TO ORGANIZE AN AL FORCE THAT WOULD BE STRONG ENOUGH TO KEEP COMBATANTS APART. IMPORTANT THING WAS TO GET TALKS STARTED SO THAT SEARCH FOR NEW FORMULA COULD BEGIN.

5. SYRIA. AS IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH AMB SEELYE (REF A), SALAM WAS VERY CRITICAL OF WAY SYRIA HAS PLAYED ITS HAND IN LEBANESE GAME. HE COULD UNDERSTAND THAT SYRIA WANTED TO CONTROL EVENTS IN LEBANON, AND IF THEY HAD ACTED SUBTLY THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN ACCOMMODATED; HOWEVER, ASSAD HAD BEEN VERY CLUMSY AND DISPLAYED HIS IGNORANCE OF LEBANESE POLITICS. ALL LEBANESE HAD BEEN HORRIFIED BY EXCESSES OF THE SAIQA, AND ASSAD HAD FURTHER ALIENATED THEM BY SENDING ZUHAIR MUHSIN TO CHTURA AS HIS SPOKESMAN.

6. THE U.S. ROLE. SALAM WAS LESS CRITICAL OF U.S. THAN IN HIS TALK WITH AMB SEELYE. HE REITERATED WELL-KNOWN LITANY THAT USG CONSTANTLY ACTED AGAINST ITS OWN INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST BY SUPPORTING ISRAEL, BUT MADE NO REFERENCE TO U.S. PARTICIPATION IN A "CONSPIRACY" AGAINST LEBANON (PARA 4.1REF A) EXCEPT TO SAY THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE IT. HE SAID MOST USEFUL STEP USG COULD TAKE NOW WOULD BE TO PUT PRESSURE ON CHRISTIANS, AND SYRIANS IF WE COULD, TO COME TO CONFERENCE TABLE WITH MINIMUM OF CONDITIONS. CHARGE REPLIED THAT, AS SALAM KNEW FROM HIS TALK WITH AMB SEELYE, WE HAD BEEN TRYING TO FIND WAY TO MAKE DIRECT CONTACT WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND ARE STILL INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING SITUATION WITH THEM.

7. COMMENT: AS AMB SEELYE NOTED, SAEB SALAM IS CHARMING, WELL INFORMED AND PRAGMATIC. HE KNOWS
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THAT AS LONG AS WAR GOES ON HE HAS NO POWER, BECAUSE HE HAS NO TROOPS. IF AND WHEN TALKING STAGE BEGINS, HOWEVER, TRADITIONAL LEBANESE POLITICIANS LIKE SALAM, WHO HAVE NOT BEEN DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE FIGHTING, MAY PLAY A USEFUL ROLE IN BRINGING VARIOUS WARRING FACTIONS TO COOFERENCE TABLE AND TEMPERING SOME OF THEIR MORE EXTREME DEMANDS.
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UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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